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ABSTRACT

The stages of developing a strategy for international and multicultural education at Ramapo College of New Jersey are described by the college's president. Principles that guided the development of the strategy, the objectives established, initiatives undertaken to achieve them, and progress to date are considered. The theme of international and multicultural education was integrated throughout the curriculum and this mission embraced research and training as well as undergraduate teaching. Six major objectives for the school's global strategy were: professional development of faculty and staff, curriculum development, student skill development, experiential learning opportunities, outreach, and the recruitment and retention of international and minority students. International and multicultural education was chosen to increase enrollments and improve opportunities at the college since it needed a distinctive identity and renewed vitality. (SW)

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Developing an Institutional Strategy for International Education: Principles, Objectives, and Progress

by

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Ramapo College of New Jersey

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Introduction

After several years of falling enrollment, and faced with the prospect of a declining applicant pool and increased costs, the Ramapo College Board of Trustees decided that it needed a strategic plan. The plan would have to contribute to the development of a distinctive identity which could be more readily understood by the general public and potential applicants, as well as by political leaders and donors. The challenge would be to develop a distinctive identity which was based on existing strengths and opportunities.

This essay retraces the steps in the development of Ramapo College's strategy for international and multicultural education, the principles which guided the development of the strategy, the objectives established, the initiatives undertaken to achieve them, and the progress made to date.

International and multicultural education was chosen as the strategic

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direction for Ramapo not only because the new president believed strongly that every college graduate should be globally literate and the recipient of a broad liberal arts education, but also because Ramapo College has a distinct set of assets and opportunities which suggested that this would be the direction to take in strengthening institutional distinctiveness and attractiveness.

Assets

More than one-half of Ramapo's faculty have had substantial experience in other nations and cultures. They gained this experience through scholarly research, graduate education, early childhood, and extensive travel and consultancies. Two of Ramapo's faculty are nationally known for their leadership in international education. For the past five years, Ramapo College's student Model UN program has won "best delegation" honors in competition against Harvard, Army, Georgetown, Pittsburgh, and other prominent institutions. A Ramapo faculty member directs a 19-college consortium of scholars and teachers studying immigration and preparing scholarly and teaching materials for the study of immigration and ethnic communities in New Jersey.

Opportunities

Northern New Jersey has become home for the headquarters of many multinational and foreign firms. Ramapo's neighbors include Japanese firms such as Sharp, Minolta and Sony, Italian firms such as SIMAC, Korean firms such as Samsung, and many others. Northern New Jersey consists

of a large number of ethnic and nationality groups because more than one-half of those who came through Ellis Island found their way to and through New Jersey, and, in recent years, large numbers of people from Spanish-speaking and Asian countries have come to the area. The United Nations is only 45 minutes away, and the College is in close proximity to many other international and multinational agencies and organizations.

Principles

In developing a strategy, it is necessary not only to assess assets and opportunities, but also to develop a set of principles for decision-making. At Ramapo, we decided on the following principles to guide us in developing our identity as the "college of choice for a global education."

1. We decided that our theme of international and multicultural should be pervasive throughout the curriculum, in professional studies such as accounting as well as in general education and area studies. We decided on an integrative approach that would make it possible for all programs to be included and not limit our efforts to particular majors.

2. We also decided that our strategy should include both international and multicultural themes. After all, the U.S. is part of the world, and we have a great diversity of ethnic groups and nationalities in our midst. It is just as important that our

students understand the composition and diversity of American society as it is for them to appreciate the diversity in the world.

3. Our strategy includes the extracurriculum as well as the curriculum. Our efforts will touch all areas of campus life.

4. Our strategic mission embraces research and training as well as undergraduate teaching. There is an important role for our faculty to play through its scholarly activities and work with graduate students through our Faculty Fellows program. Our international and multicultural themes will be affected by all these activities.

5. Our program is being developed through campus expertise as well as through partnerships with others whose expertise lies in different areas. In this manner, the sum of what we do can be greater than the total of the individual parts.

The Importance of Partnerships

Those who advocate the benefits of international education often start with the premise that nations are interdependent. I agree, but go a step further. Just as nations are interdependent, I believe that institutions of higher education are also interdependent. Colleges should seek joint ventures as strategic partnerships, building on local strengths and joining forces with others so that programs can be even stronger

and more extensive than under local efforts alone. Such efforts at Ramapo include our Faculty Fellow program, our partnership program with the Newark school system, our joint Ramapo-Rutgers Peace Institute, our consortium for immigration studies, our articulation agreements with community colleges, and our joint Fulbright programs with other institutions.

Objectives

Having reviewed our need for a distinctive identity, assessed our environment, and established a set of principles, we then identified six major objectives for our global strategy. These six are (1) professional development of faculty and staff, (2) curriculum development, (3) skill development of students, (4) experiential learning opportunities, (5) outreach, and (6) the recruitment and retention of international and minority students.

By professional development, we include seminars for current faculty to learn more about the international and multicultural potential for their courses and programs, the addition of visiting scholars, and the introduction of invited speakers for both the campus and broader community. By curriculum development, we mean the introduction of international and multicultural courses, the revision of existing courses in general education and majors, the introduction of and expansion of foreign language programs, and the enrichment of other course offerings at the college. By skill development, we mean the strengthening of all courses and programs

to enhance the career potential of Ramapo students and graduates by introducing additional foreign language instruction, interactive computing, and telecommunications capacities for instruction and teleconferencing. We are learning from the best foreign language program in the nation as we enhance our foreign language instructional capacity.

By experiential learning we include study abroad opportunities, a dormitory dedicated to international and multicultural issues, extensive contact with the ethnic and multicultural communities of New Jersey and New York, placement in international coop internships around the world, and other extra-curricular opportunities. Our outreach efforts include the extension of these new programs and capacities at Ramapo to area high schools, colleges, corporations, and communities through our existing and new partnership programs.

Finally, our sixth objective is to increase and strengthen the recruitment of all students, including international and minority students, through our international and multicultural programming. At the end of three years, we expect our student body to consist of approximately 29% international and minority students.

Initiatives

We have undertaken a broad array of initiatives to meet our strategic objectives. We have added new faculty in Italian, French, and Spanish.

In addition to joint Fulbright programs with area colleges, we have received Fulbright funding for visiting scholars. We have raised funds for student travel scholarships abroad and have received pledges for support of named professorships. Our weekly Master Lecture series has undertaken a program of topics related to our international and multicultural themes. We are working with an Indonesian bank with a New York office to develop a pre-MBA program for the bank's employees. This initiative will help us develop the capacity to offer an Institute in American Studies for many other potential students.

With Sony and Minolta, we are developing a program in Japanese language, history and culture which will be open at first to the American employees of Japanese firms, and later will help us develop the capacity to offer such courses and programs to all students. In order to bring greater attention to the humanities and social sciences, and to help recruit to Ramapo from among the large number of high-achieving New Jersey high school students who leave the state to attend college, we have created the Oxford Honors Program. This program is already bringing new students to campus. Through private funds we have raised travel scholarships so that Oxford honor students may study at Oxford in the summer after their junior year. With Rutgers University, we are co-sponsoring a state-supported Peace Institute which will undertake research, extension services, and curriculum development. Our expanded telecommunications capacity will enable us to link up electronically to area schools, colleges, and corporations in providing both transmission and reception services. We are talking with a major neighborhood community center

in Newark about a joint effort and the establishment of an outreach center in Newark for Ramapo College faculty and students.

New institutional liaisons are being established in the United Kingdom, Canada, Puerto Rico, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Italy, Japan, and elsewhere. Our Partnership for Progress program with the Newark Board of Education was one of the first initiatives and is a strong component of our multicultural educational thrust. We have added staff to assist in recruiting additional international and minority students, and we have hired a job developer to create coop internships with multinational corporations around the world.

Funding

Funds for these strategic initiatives have been reallocated from the college's base budget and received through competitive grants programs at federal and state agencies. The next phase of our efforts will seek additional funding from federal and state sources and still more funds from private donors.

Consequences

Perhaps the most important consequence of these efforts is a renewed sense of vitality at the campus, rejuvenated morale, and a strengthened identity of Ramapo as a distinctive college. Applications for admissions have begun to increase, and retention shows signs of increasing as well.

Opportunities for faculty and students have increased dramatically, and public recognition of the college by school superintendents, principals, and guidance counselors, as well as by corporate leaders, is evident.

Conclusion

Ramapo College is a case study in how an institution with the need for a distinctive identity and a renewed sense of vitality can assess its local strengths and regional opportunities and develop a strategic plan to reach new levels of distinctiveness and vitality. At Ramapo, we chose international and multicultural education as the theme for our strategy to increase enrollments and improve opportunities for faculty and students.

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